# Introduction

The goal of this study is to attempt to understand other cultures by listening to and questioning my own assumption, views, and interpretations. The questions that I tried to answer during my fieldwork were: What surprises me, intrigues me, and disturbs me about the subculture that I am studying? To make the most out of this experience I decided to study a subculture that I wanted to understand in greater depth. Initially I narrowed my choices down to the workplace or a family interaction. I decided that, as a new employee, I did not want to ask my boss for permission to observe her and my coworkers, so I ultimately chose to study a family interaction.

At the time that the study was conducted there was a conflict in my family surrounding my brother’s 18th birthday. My grandpa and I had thrown my brother a party at a restaurant just two weeks earlier, but some people did not come because they did not want to spend time together. The information that will be included in the study is the narrative or involved observations that I made about the subject during my fieldwork, the analysis of the activities that occurred, and the artifacts that were involved. I will present my observations chronologically, and the artifacts will be presented afterward. This study is limited to the observation of the preparations for a party thrown for my brother’s 18th birthday, and not the party itself. The events that occurred at the first party hosted by me and my grandpa will also be absent.

# Methodology

I conducted the study by stepping out into the field with a notebook and a pen on Sunday, June 27th, 2010. The experience that I used to obtain my data was a shopping expedition that I had with my mom to prepare for a family dinner to celebrate my brother’s 18th birthday. Rather than select a specific place for my study I employed objective and detached observation as my mom selected the specific places she needed to go to prepare for the party. We made two stops within the city of Woodinville during the study. The first stop was a grocery store, and the second was a hardware store. As a member of the family that I am studying I bring the knowledge and experiences I have acquired from my life-long relationships with my subjects. My goal is to attempt to understand other cultures through listening to and questioning my assumption, views, and interpretations. My study will be influenced by my own worldview. A worldview is a description of a person’s view of the world. In other words, the interpretations that follow are being made by me, and are therefore only a partial view of reality.

# Data Presentation and Analysis

12:42 PM – My mom picks me up. We begin a conversation about my dad’s sister, my Aunt Teresa, who has been diagnosed with liver disease and is expected to die in the next few months.

As my mom and I were talking about our lives with my Aunt Teresa she told a story about some of the physical abuse my Aunt had experiences at the hands of her ex-husband several years ago. My mom said, “He kicked her in her pussy.” I was disturbed by her use of the word “pussy”. I was also disturbed by the irrelevance of this story in relationship to her liver disease and her life as a whole. In my view it is important to reflect on the good things in a person’s life when they are dying and after they are dead.

12:45 PM – My mom notices me taking notes. I explain that I am doing fieldwork for my cultural anthropology class. We continue our conversation, but change the subject to my dad’s mom who died in 2008.

I was intrigued by a story about my grandma’s work as an artist and art history professor, as well as a story about some anthropological work she had done.

12:49 PM – My mom changes our destination. We were on our way to the hardware store, but after talking about which stores we should go to she decides to go to the grocery store first. We continue talking about my dad’s family. My mom suggests that I talk to my grandma’s brother and my dad’s brother’s, my Uncle John’s, ex-wife about my grandma’s anthropological work.

I was surprised that my mom would suggest that I talk to my Uncle’s ex-wife because my mom had previously indicated that she hated her and was happy when they got divorced.

I was disturbed that my mom had not already decided where she was going. Our family was going to be at her house in a few hours. I was also disturbed at her suggestion that I talk to people that I hardly knew about my dead grandma. It is a sensitive subject. Also, in my view, to talk to my Uncle’s ex-wife would be an act of support for her, and an act of betrayal against his new love, who I like.

1:52 PM – We arrive at the grocery store and begin shopping for a birthday gift for my mom’s boss. My mom picks out a balloon for that purpose.

1:56 PM – We pick out fig jam, flagship cheese, pre-packaged Mediterranean salad, garlic vinaigrette, and *panette*. I try some food samples, including *pico de gallo* with corn chips. I watch the other shoppers make their own decisions about which items to buy as we make our own decisions about which items to buy.

I was intrigued by the abundance on display at the market. The foods and their prices mingled with the shoppers and their lists amid the rattling of shopping chart wheels.

12:59 PM – We wait at the bakery counter as the bakers talk. We hail one of the bakers. My mom picks out a cupcake for her boss. She also picks out a discounted pound cake.

I was surprised by the inattentiveness of the bakers, mostly because we were running behind. We watched the clock tick away 5 minutes from our prep time as we waited at the counter for one of the bakers to help us.

1:04 PM – We continued shopping.

I was intrigued by the skill it takes to perfect an eating experience by creating a palate of complimentary flavors, and by the process of comparison shopping.

1:07 PM – We check out using the Express Lane. Our total is $48.57.

I was disturbed by the soft-core pornographic images on the cover of the magazines strategically placed at the checkout. The people on the cover were the same age as me and my brother. There are not pictures of me or my brother, nearly naked, posing in a sexual way. And if there were they would not be on public display. I felt disturbed because I did not go to the grocery store for sex. We went for groceries. I do not understand why I was forced to look at naked people in the middle of an otherwise pleasant experience, even if their bodies are Photoshopped to look “amazing”.

1:10 PM – As we exit the store two adult black males ask us if we want to buy some candy from their children that are sitting vacantly at a table a few feet away. Since we bought everything we need in the store we say, “No, thank you.” My mom asks me if she should make a donation, and I say no.

I was surprised that people would try to sell candy right outside of a grocery store. Unlike the Girl Scouts who sell their own cookies, these people were selling candy straight from the store right outside the store.

11:12 PM – We load the groceries into my mom’s car. As we move on to our next destination, the hardware store, I start to feel carsick.

11:18 PM – We arrive at the hardware store. We spend a minute looking for my mom’s shopping list, and then decide to go in without it.

11:22 PM – I learn we are shopping for a toilet seat for the guest bathroom. We begin selecting a toilet seat based on the size, material, and price. We talk about the diameter and shape of her guest toilet and my mom picks an inexpensive round white plastic one.

I was surprised that the guest bathroom did not already have a suitable toilet seat, because we were hours away from the arrival of our family. I was also surprised when my mom started talking about her butt and how it goes numb sometimes. In my view that is private a medical problem and should be discussed with an unbiased medical professional.

11:26 PM – We look for an employee to help us locate a glass turntable for my microwave. We find someone reading in the model kitchens. Then we look at carabineers for my brother’s gym equipment, and another employee asks us if we need any help. We say no and walk to the check out. A checker greets us from the end of the check stand. I ask my mom if I can have a cold soda from the strategically placed refrigerator nearby. She says yes.

11:33 PM – We walk to the exit. On the way out there is an empty computer available for people to virtually design their living spaces. I stop to look at it. When I shake the mouse to clear the screen saver I see that the last person to use the computer had performed a search for “fart porn.”

11:34 PM – Outside the exit there is a white woman selling snack food. The smells of grilled hotdogs and popping popcorn waft through the hot summer air.

11:35 PM – My mom and I notice a grandma playing with her grandson on a lawn mower and talk about how dangerous that could be. My mom shares a story about a girl who died in similar situation when she was growing up.

11:37 PM – We load the car. My mom lights a cigarette. I start to feel carsick again.

## Artifacts

An Article written by My Dad’s Mom



Artifacts from the Grocery Store

  

Artifacts from the Hardware Store

 

# Ethnology

# Conclusion